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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000443

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SUBJECT: BELARUS, RUSSIA, S-300S AND IRAN

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Classified By: Classified by Ambassador George Krol for Reasons 1.4(B,D
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11. (C) Summary: A prominent British journal recently wrote that Moscow might be selling S-300 anti-aircraft missile systems to Iran, using Belarus as a middleman to hide the sale. Although all three governments have denied such a sale, on April 21 Minsk received its first delivery of Russian S-300PS missiles. On that same day Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov was in Minsk with a delegation of military officers discussing, among other things, expanding anti-aircraft cooperation, and a senior Iranian delegation was also in Minsk, supposedly seeking to expand commercial ties with Belarus. While such a coincidence is by no means conclusive, it certainly raises questions about the possibility of illicit missile sales. End summary.

12. (U) On April 17, British journal Jane's Defence Weekly wrote that its sources report Russia is selling S-300PS anti-aircraft missile systems to Iran, using Belarus as a cut-out. Since that article was published, the Belarusian, Russian and Iranian governments have all denied that any such sales are taking place. Belarusian Defense Minister Leonid Maltsev called such reports "fantasy," and told the press the GOB does not have the legal right to re-export the S-300s it is acquiring from Russia. Iranian Commerce Minister Massoud Mir-Kazemi told reporters in Minsk on April 21, "The question of deliveries of S-300 systems was not discussed. From the viewpoint of military technology, we are self-sufficient and there is no need for us to consider buying weapons abroad." According to international press reports, Russia has admitted it is selling Tor-M1 missile systems to Iran.

First S-300s Delivered

13. (U) Maltsev announced that the first of four S-300PS missile systems arrived in Minsk by special train from Russia on April 21. (Note: By "systems" Maltsev likely means battalions. Belarus already has other S-300 units active. Post is unclear why these latest deliveries are receiving so much press, unless it is intended as a dig at NATO -- the new S-300s will be deployed on the Polish border.) He said the other three systems would arrive by the end of the year. Previously it had been announced that the first delivery would take place in March, then it was said this was pushed back to June. There was no advance notice of this delivery. Maltsev said Belarus is to receive 24 S-300 launchers, and press reports claim they will go into service with the 115th Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade, headquartered in Brest.

Russian Defense Minister in Town to Discuss Air Defense

14. (U) According to Belarusian press, Russian Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov and a delegation of military officers were in Minsk April 21. In a televised meeting Ivanov announced that Russia and Belarus should sign the documents to integrate their air defense networks by the end of 2006. In practical terms, he said this means a joint air defense command would be created with the authority to deploy aircraft and air defense systems across the Russian-Belarusian border without having to wait for any political decision. Maltsev agreed, and added that the two sides just have to complete some "paperwork" before an agreement could be signed. Ivanov and the Belarusians also discussed a large-scale joint military exercise to be held in Belarus in June. Russia intends to send 1,500 servicemen, Tu-160 strategic bombers, SU-27 fighters and an AWACS aircraft under the control of Russia's 20th Army to Belarus for the exercise.

Meanwhile, an Iranian Trade Delegation Visits

15. (U) From April 17 to 21 an Iranian delegation, headed by Commerce Minister Massoud Mir-Kazemi, visited Minsk. Mir-Kazemi explicitly told the press he did not meet with the Russian delegation and did not discuss the transfer of S-300s or nuclear cooperation during his visit. Other members of the delegation, the seventh Belarusian-Iranian Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation, included Deputy Commerce Minister Mehdi Ghazanfari, senior advisor to the Iranian Chamber of Commerce and Industry Asadol Asgaroladi,

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representatives of the Iranian companies Keyson and Pooyandegan Rah Saadat, and other unnamed Iranian businessmen. According to press reports, the Iranians met with President Lukashenko, Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Semashko, the Ministers of Trade and Industry, senior officials from the Ministry of Energy, the State Aviation Committee, Minsk City Executive Committee, the Belarusian National Technology Transfer Center, and Belneftekhim. The Iranians also reportedly visited the companies Minsk Tractor Works, Amkodor, BelAZ, Integral, and others. Lukashenko asked Mir-Kazemi to pass to Iranian President Ahmadinejad that Minsk would honor "all its earlier commitments to Tehran," but did not specify what these commitments were.

16. (U) The Iranians signed a number of agreements during their visit, including a Memorandum of Understanding on transferring technical and engineering services between the two countries, an agreement between Pooyandegan Rah Saadat and Integral (Belarus' largest manufacturer of microchips) to manufacture medical monitors in Belarus, and between Keyson and the Minsk Free Economic Zone on investment (Keyson is building a USD 110 million truck stop near Minsk). The Iranians were especially interested in buying earth moving equipment from BelAZ and Amkodor (specifically Amkodor 208B and 451A loaders and 332S-01 and 342S5 multi-purpose chassis). The Iranians and Belarusians also reportedly discussed increasing cooperation in banking, and increasing assembly of MAZ trucks in Iran and Samand cars in Belarus. Belarusian Minister of Industry Anatoly Rusetsky stressed, "There are no dual-purpose goods in the agreement, we are developing trade in economic and scientific areas." Mir-Kazemi also stated that all trade between the two countries is strictly civilian.

Comments: We're Skeptical

17. (C) DATT Comment: Vo Slavu Rodiny (official newspaper of

the Ministry of Defense) has written that the unit accepting the S-300PS systems, the 115th Air Defense Brigade, has prepared firing positions for the S-300s (which require different positions than the SA-3s they are replacing). The unit is also reportedly renovating barracks and the mess hall required for the expected increase in personnel. The GOB has publicized the arrival of the S-300s too much for Belarus to be able to simply send all arriving S-300 units on to Iran. End DATT comment.

18. (C) Post Comment: Post has no information to prove or disprove allegations that Belarus is planning to ship S-300s to Iran. However, the coincidence of the first S-300 delivery arriving early, when Russian air defense experts are in town, along with an Iranian Commerce Ministry delegation in Minsk raises some eyebrows.
Krol